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Russia

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

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The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice; however, religious minorities, in particular Muslim followers of Turkish theologian Said Nursi's work, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientologists, faced bans on their religious literature and difficulties registering their legal entities. Although the constitution provides for the equality of all religious groups before the law and the separation of church and state, the government did not always respect these provisions.

Conditions remained largely the same for most religious groups, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for most of the population. However, the government targeted certain minority religious groups when it enforced legal restrictions on religious freedom. Restrictions on religious freedom generally fell into four categories: registration of religious organizations; access to places of worship (including access to land and building permits); visas for foreign religious personnel; and government raids on religious organizations and detentions of individuals.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Religious matters were not a source of social tension or problems for the large majority of citizens, but there were some problems between majority and minority groups. Because xenophobia, racism, and religious bigotry are often intertwined, it was often difficult to discern the particular motivation for discrimination against members of religious groups. Activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) occasionally disseminated publications and held protest meetings against religious groups considered nontraditional, including alternative Orthodox congregations. Some ROC clergy publicly stated their opposition to any expansion of the presence of non-Orthodox Christian denominations.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. government engaged a number of religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. embassy and consulates worked with NGOs to encourage the development of programs to sensitize officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. In many instances, federal and regional officials strongly supported the implementation of these programs. The embassy and consulates maintained a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities through frequent communication and meetings to discuss the U.S. government's concerns. Embassy officers looked into possible violations of religious freedom and discussed visa issues affecting religious workers with the Passport and Visa

Unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID). The U.S. ambassador addressed religious freedom in consultations with government officials, and other Department of State and U.S. government officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with officials on many occasions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 6,592,769 square miles and a population of 142 million. In practice only a minority of citizens actively participated in any religion. Many who identified themselves as members of a religious group participated in religious life rarely or not at all. There is no single set of reliable statistics that breaks down the population by denomination, and the following statistics are compiled from government, polling, and religious group sources.

Approximately 100 million citizens identify themselves as Russian Orthodox, although only 5 percent of Russians call themselves observant. Muslims, with a population estimated between 10 million and 23 million, form the largest religious minority. The majority of Muslims live in the Volga-Ural region and the North Caucasus, although Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and parts of Siberia also have sizable Muslim populations. The majority of the country's large economic immigrant population comes from Muslim countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus. There are an estimated one million Buddhists, the majority of whom live in the traditionally Buddhist regions of Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya. According to the NGO Slavic Center for Law and Justice, Protestants make up the second largest group of Christian believers, with 3,500 registered organizations and more than two million adherents. The Roman Catholic Church estimated that there are 600,000 Catholics, most of whom are not ethnic Russians. Estimates of the country's Jewish population range between 250,000 and one million, with the majority living in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. In some areas such as Yakutiya, Chukotka, and Mari-El, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or along with other religions.

According to an annual report by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), 23,494 religious organizations were registered as of January 1, 2010, 416 more than as of January 2009. In 2008 these groups broke down as follows: Russian Orthodox (12,586), Muslim (3,815), Protestant (several denominations totaling 3,410), Jehovah's Witnesses (402), Jewish (286), Orthodox Old Believers (283), Catholic (240), Buddhist (200), and other denominations.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice; however, religious minorities, in particular Muslim followers of Turkish theologian Said Nursi's work, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientologists, faced bans on their religious literature and difficulties registering their legal entities. Although the constitution provides for the equality of all religious groups before the law and the separation of church and state, the government did not always respect these provisions.

The 1997 Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations (the 1997 law) provides citizens and legal aliens the right to choose or change their religion freely or to have no religion. The law also provides the right to believe individually or with others, the right to spread religious and other convictions, and the right to act in accordance with those convictions. These rights may be restricted only to the degree necessary to protect the constitutional structure of the government, morality, health, the rights and legal interests of persons, the defense of the country, or the security of the government. No one is required to state his or her attitude toward religion. No one may be forced to disclose his or her attitude toward religion, or to participate or not in worship, other religious ceremonies, the activities of a religious association, or in the teaching of religion.

The law states that those who violate religious freedom will be "punished to the full extent possible," but does not specify what the punishment will be, nor under what circumstances it will be imposed. The Administrative Violations Code and the

criminal code both punish obstruction of the right to freedom of conscience and belief; however, there were no reports of any instances in which these articles were enforced. In practice redress is sought through the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg which makes rulings based on violations of the European Convention on Human Rights. The government generally pays damages awarded by the ECHR, but rarely undertakes the corrective measures suggested by the court.

The Office of the Federal Human Rights Ombudsman has a religious freedom department, which receives and responds to complaints. The ombudsman often intercedes on behalf of those who submit complaints. He cannot compel other government bodies to follow the law, but his attention has yielded some improvements in the respect of religious freedom. The office received 3,000 religious freedom complaints in 2009, five times more than in the previous year. Many of the complaints allege multiple individual violations. The office estimated that approximately 75 percent of these complaints represented genuine violations of religious freedom rights provided under the law.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities maintain consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and monitor application of the 1997 law. At the national level, groups interact with a special governmental commission on religion that includes representatives from law enforcement bodies and government ministries. On broader policy questions, religious groups continued to deal with the Presidential Administration through the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations, chaired by the head of the Presidential Administration. The broad-based council is composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academic specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of traditional and major nontraditional groups. Other governmental bodies for religious affairs include a Governmental Commission for the Affairs of Religious Associations.

Religious organizations also may interact with regional and local authorities. The offices of some of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential Representatives (Polpreds) include sub offices that address social and religious problems. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials for liaison with religious organizations. Religious minorities most often encounter problems at the regional level.

The Russian Academy of State Service, headed by Vladimir Yegorov, works with religious freedom advocates, such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, to train regional and municipal officials in properly implementing the 1997 law. The academy opens many of its conferences to international audiences. In December 2009 the Rector of the Academy and Patriarch Kirill signed an agreement on widening cooperation between the ROC and the Academy.

On February 26, 2010, the Constitutional Court declared that "[d]ecisions by the European Court of Human Rights are binding for Russia." The court continued: "The State must pay compensation to a person whose rights were violated as determined by the European Court and make sure his/her rights are restored as far as it is possible." This development is significant in light of the government's past tendency to pay compensation in line with ECHR decision, but not enact reforms.

On June 10, 2010, in Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow v. Russia, the ECHR unanimously found that the government had violated articles six (right to a fair trial), nine (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion), and 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights and ordered it to end the violations and to redress their effects. In addition to determining that the government's refusal to reregister Jehovah's Witnesses' Moscow community was a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, the court rejected the government's claims that Jehovah's Witnesses broke up families, improperly proselytized, deceitfully lured minors into the church, incited members to not fulfill civic duties, and damaged the health of citizens. The court further stated that "a competent adult patient is free to decide... whether or not to undergo surgery or treatment or, by the same token to have a blood transfusion." The court assessed monetary damages against the government.

Citizens are equal before the law without regard to their religion. Establishing benefits or limitations or other forms of discrimination because of a person's attitude toward religion is not allowed. By law officials representing organs of the state do not have the right to use their position to compel others to adhere to any religious beliefs.

The country is by law a secular state without a state religion, where all religious organizations are equal before the law. The preamble to the 1997 law, however, acknowledges Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions as constituting an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage and also recognizes the "special contribution" of Russian Orthodox Christianity to the country's history and to the establishment and development of its spirituality and culture. During the reporting period, for the first time, presidential decrees explicitly mentioned the four "traditional" religions, effectively establishing different treatment for them.

While neither the constitution nor the 1997 law accords explicit privileges or advantages to the four traditional religions, in practice the ROC cooperates more closely with the government than do other religious groups. The ROC has entered into a number of formal and informal agreements with various government ministries that give the ROC greater access than other religious groups to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, police, and the military. Nearly all of the religious facilities in prisons are Russian Orthodox.

The government permitted Orthodox chaplains and priests broad access to military bases. In July 2009 President Medvedev issued an executive order establishing state-funded military chaplains, representing "the traditional Russian religions." On December 1, 2009, the position of Assistant Commander for Working with the Believers was introduced, and the Defense Ministry announced the establishment of a special office responsible for working with religious servicemen and managing the chaplains. That same month the government organized training for Orthodox chaplains, with nothing planned for chaplains of the other three traditional religions. By January 2010 200 ROC clergy had been appointed to military units. In addition to the military chaplains paid by the state, an estimated 2,000 ROC priests also work in the military, as do a small number of Muslim and Protestant clergy.

Under the executive order, Muslims, Jews, or Buddhists must make up 10 percent of a military unit before an official chaplain of that religion can be appointed. In February 2010 the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Nizhny Novgorod unsuccessfully requested permission to introduce Muslim chaplains into a troop of soldiers. According to a Defense Ministry survey, two-thirds of the country's soldiers are religious adherents, and 83 percent of those are Russian Orthodox, with 8 percent Muslim and 9 percent from other denominations, including Protestants.

According to the Ministry of Defense, as of January 2010, approximately 2,000 Orthodox priests served as voluntary military chaplains, 950 of them stationed permanently with a military detachment. As of the end of the reporting period, according to SOVA Center, an NGO which seeks to combat extremism and nationalism, out of 455 religious facilities in penitentiary institutions, 420 were Orthodox chapels, 25 mosques, seven Buddhist dugans, and three Catholic chapels. ROC activities with the government include support for the psychological rehabilitation of servicemen returning from conflict zones, holding religious services for those serving in conflict zones, and cooperating with the MVD to combat extremism.

Some observers expressed concern regarding the ROC's increasing political power. Government officials routinely consulted with ROC leaders on policy. In July 2009 United Russia and Patriarch Kirill announced an agreement allowing the ROC to review all draft legislation pending before the State Duma. A deputy from the ruling United Russia party assured reporters that comments from other religious groups would also be considered, if "they represent a significant portion of the electorate." During the reporting period, the ROC presented a package of proposals regarding the official social and economic program of the United Russia party. ROC leaders regularly visited neighboring countries on

diplomatic missions, including attending the inauguration of the newly elected president of Ukraine in February 2010, and the country's foreign minister praised the ROC for "playing a major role in bolstering Russia's international position."

On March 18, 2010, Patriarch Kirill told reporters during a meeting in Armenia that he considered political pluralism to be "a toy" and "a passing fad." Later that week, Kirill came in sixth on a list of "10 most trusted politicians" in the country, in a survey conducted by the Levada polling center. The ROC also has issued public statements advocating the unity of church and state into "one community" with "two autonomous powers." It also has emphasized that it believes in tolerance and harmonious relations between religious groups, but that "Russia is an Orthodox country" in regard to history, culture, tradition, and number of believers.

The 2009 National Security Concept of the Russian Federation states that "ensuring national security includes countering extremist activity by nationalist, religious, ethnic, and other organizations and structures directed at disrupting the Russian Federation's unity and territorial integrity and destabilizing the domestic political and social situation in the country."

The 2002 Law on Countering Extremist Activity (extremism law), amended in July 2006, can affect religious groups by criminalizing a broad spectrum of speech and activities. Among the forms of "extremist activity" is "incitement to social, racial, national, or religious discord." The law also allows charges of extremism where persons are alleged to have defended or expressed sympathy for individuals already charged with extremism.

Four times a year, the government updates a list of banned extremist publications. According to the SOVA Center, there has been a growing tendency toward prosecution for blasphemy under the umbrella of extremism. Those who publish or distribute the texts face a four-year prison term. The current list includes Islamic religious texts, a series of neo-pagan materials intolerant of other religious groups (Christianity in particular), and several texts that were explicitly racist or anti-Semitic. The SOVA Center noted in its annual report on xenophobia that "the Federal List of Extremist Materials, whose quality is so poor that one cannot simply use it, is rapidly enlarging." The list, which was established in July 2007 with 14 titles, included 692 items as of the end of the reporting period. Islamic materials reportedly compose the majority of the religious items on the list; the MOJ added 52 Jehovah's Witnesses publications during the reporting period. Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was added to the list after Jehovah's Witnesses publications. On December 9, 2009, an anti-Hare Krishna leaflet that accuses Hare Krishnas of trafficking drugs and weapons and being ready to kill was reportedly the first item to be taken off the list.

On April 24, 2010, the government passed to the State Duma a new bill that would expand the powers of the Federal Security Service (FSB) by letting it warn individuals when their actions were on the path to "extremism." Punishment for ignoring such warnings could include a 15-day prison sentence and fines. Human rights groups voiced opposition to the law because it is a governmental tool to harass anyone who does not agree with the government's actions. By the end of the reporting period, the draft bill had not become law; but President Medvedev had stated his intention to sign the bill once it passed the State Duma.

The government observes Orthodox Christmas as a national holiday. On June 1, 2010, President Medvedev signed a law making July 28 a national holiday to mark the founding of the ROC with the baptism of Prince Vladimir in Kiev in 988. Muslim lawmakers subsequently asked for a similar national holiday to mark the arrival of Islam in the country. Several regional governments, including majority-Muslim Chechnya and Tatarstan, celebrate other Islamic religious days as official holidays.

On May 25, 2010, political authorities and Patriarch Kirill jointly celebrated a Day of Slavic Culture and Literature, devoted to the invention of the Cyrillic alphabet in the ninth century by the Orthodox saints Cyril and Methodius. The celebration involved more than 40,000 persons, including students who were reportedly required to attend. According to the Slavic Center for Religion and Justice, the ROC has pushed the state to increase the significance of this holiday.

The law prohibits religious associations, but not their members, from participating in elections of government officials, political parties, and movements, and providing material or other aid to political groups.

There is a universal military draft for men, but the constitution provides for alternative service for those who refuse to bear arms for reasons of conscience. The standard military service period is 12 months, while alternative service in a Ministry of Defense agency is 18 months, and alternative service in a nondefense agency is 21 months. Some human rights groups have complained that the extended length of service for draftees requesting alternative assignments acts as a punishment for those who exercise their convictions. Students attending religious training institutions are not eligible for education deferrals from military service.

On March 26, 2010, the Surgut City Court of Khanty-Mansiysk ruled that 29 Scientology religious books, lectures, and brochures should be labeled as "extremist" under the extremism law. The decision, which occurred after an ex parte hearing that did not include anyone representing the Church of Scientology in the country, followed the seizure in 2008 of six sets of 28 books and lectures that had been mailed to Scientologists in Surgut from their colleagues in the United States.

In January 2010 a city court in Altai, in the Gorno-Altai republic, ruled 16 Jehovah's Witnesses publications "extremist."

In December 2009 the Supreme Court upheld the ruling which dissolved the Jehovah's Witnesses' congregation in Taganrog and declared 34 of their publications "extremist." In September 2009 the Taganrog court had ruled in favor of dissolution, partly on the grounds of a questionable expert study that found 34 of the congregation's texts to be "extremist." Some observers expressed the concern that these decisions would effectively ban Jehovah's Witness activity in the country, because the "extremism" appellation could apply nationwide, and because their activity would be hampered by the inability to possess their literature.

In September 2009 the MOJ established a Scientific Advisory Board to check religious materials for extremism. Chaired by Vitaly Naumkin, director of the Institute of Oriental Studies, the board's members include academics and representatives of the four traditional religions. The board reviews any materials referred by judicial and law enforcement authorities, the MOJ, individual citizens, and organizations. The board then issues a nonbinding, advisory opinion to be published on the MOJ Web site. Should the board find signs of extremism, the opinion must be forwarded to the prosecutor's office. The MOJ established this academic board in response to requests from the country's Muslim leaders to improve the procedure of checking religious texts for extremism.

In addition to the Scientific Advisory Board, there are regional "experts" that also review religious materials for extremism. The quality of scholarly expertise of these persons varies from region to region and affects the merit of evaluations made on issues of extremism. Some experts possess a thorough background in theological studies, while others do not and are merely political supporters of a local branch of the ROC or the local authorities.

The 1997 law creates three categories of religious communities with different levels of legal status and privileges: groups, local organizations, and centralized organizations.

The most basic unit is a "religious group," which has the right to conduct worship services and rituals and to teach religion to its members. A group is not registered with the government and consequently does not have legal status to open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, or the armed forces. Individual members of a group, however, may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In principle groups are thus able to rent public spaces and hold services, but in practice members of unregistered groups sometimes encountered difficulty in doing so.

A "local religious organization" (LRO) can be registered if it has at least 10 citizen members and is either a branch of a centralized organization or has existed in the locality as a religious group for at least 15 years. In October 2009 the ECHR declared that the 15-year requirement violated the European Convention on Human Rights' provisions on the freedoms of religion and association. LROs have legal status and may open bank accounts, own property, issue invitation letters to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, and conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, and the armed forces.

"Centralized religious organizations" can be registered by combining at least three local organizations of the same denomination. In addition to all the legal rights enjoyed by local organizations, centralized organizations also have the right to open new local organizations without any waiting period. Centralized organizations that have existed in the country for more than 50 years have the right to use the words "Russia" or "Russian" in their official names.

The 1997 law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups and thereby prohibit all of the activities of a religious community. Groups that fail to register may be subject to legal dissolution (often translated as "liquidation"), that is, deprivation of juridical status.

While the 1997 law remains the primary legislation, some provisions of the 2006 Law on Public Associations (NGO law) apply to religious organizations, as well. Each organization must supply full names, addresses, and passport details of members belonging to its governing body, but need not provide details of religious congresses, conferences, or governing body meetings, including the number of participants.

The NGO law grants the MOJ the authority to obtain certain documents, send its representatives (with advance notice) to attend religious organization events, and conduct an annual review of the organization's compliance with its mission statement on file with the government. Religious organizations are required to inform the MOJ of changes in leadership or address within three days of the changes taking effect. The required reporting includes information about "organized events and activities" and accounts of funds received from international and foreign organizations, foreign citizens, and stateless persons. The NGO law contains extensive annual reporting requirements. Small organizations especially complained about the time and effort needed to fulfill them, and denominations with many local organizations noted that compliance with these provisions for each local organization is highly burdensome. The law allows the government to file suit against organizations that fail to comply, and if a court finds in favor of the government, the organization may be required to close. In July 2009 President Medvedev signed into law amendments approved by the State Duma and Federation Council simplifying registration and reporting requirements, particularly for small NGOs.

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities, and they may not conduct services or other religious activities until they have acquired the status of a group or organization. In practice many foreign religious representative offices opened without registering or were accredited to a registered religious organization.

On October 12, 2009, the MOJ placed on its Web site for public comment a proposed amendment to the 1997 law which would tighten restrictions on missionary activity in the country. Among its provisions were that only religious groups registered in the country for at least 15 years may proselytize; and no one who has been sentenced for extremism may proselytize, nor may any foreigner on a tourist visa. The proposed legislation caused widespread criticism among religious freedom advocates and, in November, the MOJ removed the proposal from its Web site. The bill failed on three occasions to become law and has not been introduced or discussed in the State Duma.

The government's visa rules allow foreigners (including religious workers) with business or humanitarian visas to spend only 90 of every 180 days in the country. The effect of these rules has been to restrict severely religious groups that rely

upon foreign religious workers. The Catholic Church, which relies almost exclusively on priests from outside the country, and the Mormons, with more than 300 foreign missionaries, have been particularly hard hit by this provision. While foreign religious workers appear able to acquire visas with few problems, the 90-day limit on their stay in the country limits their ability to work and significantly increases their expenses. Although registered religious organizations have the option to sponsor foreign workers and missionaries on work visas (which do not have 90-day or 180-day limits), this is a complicated process that places significant financial and administrative burdens on the organizations. Many organizations continued to report difficulties associated with the visa rules.

The federal government does not require religious instruction in schools, but it allows public use of school buildings after hours for the ROC to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. Religion is taught in Sunday schools, in public secondary schools, and in specialized religious schools (lyceums, gymnasias); the latter have the status of a secondary educational institution. Several regions offer a course on Orthodox Christianity in public schools. In practice students may be compelled to take this course where schools do not provide alternatives.

In April 2010 a pilot program based on a presidential order from July 2009 began for religious education in schools in 19 regions of the country (with 15,445 teachers trained for the purpose), including the Muslim-majority North Caucasus, Russian Orthodox-majority areas of the country, and the Jewish Autonomous Region in the Far East. Under the program, fourth-grade students could, with parental permission, choose to study the new curriculum of "Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics." The course is divided into three possible modules over six months: one on Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism; another on the history of religious cultures; and a third on secular ethics. Parents are supposed to be allowed to select one of the three modules for their children to study and, in all but five of the pilot regions, a majority of students chose secular ethics. However, the country's human rights groups have reported instances in which ROC officials allegedly pressured parents not to allow their children to select the secular ethics portion of the course. In January 2010 after 93 percent of local parents had opted for the secular ethics course for their children, the Archbishop of Yekaterinburg and Vekhotursk met with schoolteachers in Kamensk-Uralsky (Sverdlovsk Region), for an "explanatory conversation," and the city administration offered the parents another opportunity to choose. In June 2010 the ROC publicly called for an end to what it called "the monopoly of Darwinism" in schools.

In July 2009 a group of academics, human rights advocates, and parents began collecting signatures for an appeal to President Medvedev protesting against "clericalization of general schools." In October 2009 at the opening of the Fifth Annual International Conference on Religion, Conflict, and Peace at Saint Petersburg State University, students organized an anticlerical campaign and distributed leaflets.

As in past years, some regions offered a course on the history of religion, an initiative that the minister of education suggested but did not introduce nationally. Although the Ministry of Education rejected continuing the publication and dissemination of a controversial textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture, some schools continued to use the text. The textbook contained descriptions of some religious groups that members of those groups found objectionable. The Congress of Religious Associations in the Tyumen Region appealed to the governor and the regional department of education to allow input from other religious groups into the religious culture curriculum, claiming that the course contained only the views of the ROC.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Conditions remained largely the same for most religious groups, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for most of the population. However, the government targeted certain minority religious groups when it enforced legal restrictions on religious freedom. Restrictions on religious freedom generally fell into four categories: registration of religious organizations; access to places of worship (including access to land and building

permits); visas for foreign religious personnel; and government raids on religious organizations and detentions of individuals. Several examples in each category are detailed below.

Law enforcement officials, the ROC, and the legislative branches spoke of protecting the "spiritual security" of the country by discouraging the growth of "sects" and "cults," usually understood to include some Protestant and newer religious movements.

Some regional officials used contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, to restrict the activities of religious minorities. According to many observers, local governments are more susceptible to pressure from the local religious majority and therefore more likely to discriminate against local minority religious communities. Many localities appeared to implement their own policies with very little federal interference. When the federal government intervenes in local cases, it works through the Procuracy, MOJ, Presidential Administration, and the courts. The federal government only occasionally intervened to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

Some human rights groups and religious minorities accused the procurator general of encouraging legal action against a number of minority religious groups. There were credible reports that individuals within the FSB and other law enforcement agencies harassed certain minority religious groups, investigated them for purported criminal activity and violations of tax laws, and pressured landlords to renege on contracts with those groups. In some cases the security services were thought to have influenced the MOJ to reject registration applications. Some of the difficulties encountered by religious groups are also possibly due to local corruption and the demands made by corrupt officials on religious officials.

The Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) Islamist political movement remained banned as a terrorist organization. Because HT is primarily a political organization, albeit one motivated by religious ideology, and because HT does not condemn terrorist acts, authorities' actions to restrict it and prosecute its members are not a restriction of religious freedom, per se. On June 4, 2010, the Chelyabinsk Region Court handed out sentences ranging from one and a half years to four years to five HT members.

The regions of Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan have laws banning extremist Islamic "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny registration to Muslim groups.

As of the end of the reporting period, 18 Muslim groups were banned as terrorist organizations. According to human rights groups, bans on Muslim groups for alleged ties to international terrorism made it easier for officials to detain Muslims arbitrarily for alleged connections to these groups.

In 2009 the Supreme Court ruled that the international religious organization Tablighi Jamaat was extremist and banned its activity. The general prosecutor maintained that Tablighi Jamaat is a radical organization whose goal is the re-establishment of an Islamic caliphate, but Tablighi Jamaat and some human rights activists claimed that the organization scrupulously follows the law and exists solely to educate persons about Islam.

The Supreme Court banned Nurjular, a Muslim religious organization of followers of Turkish Theologian Said Nursi, from the country in April 2008. That ban rests on the conclusion that Said Nursi's works are "extremist." Followers of Said Nursi continued to face detentions, raids, and fines during the reporting period.

The MOJ maintains a list of religious organizations (including Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist groups) that have not submitted the appropriate registration documents for review. These organizations may be dissolved. As of the end of the reporting period, 12 organizations remained on the list.

Due to legal restrictions, poor administrative procedures on the part of some local authorities, or disputes between religious organizations, an unknown number of groups have been unable to register. Some religious groups registered as

social organizations because they were unable to do so as religious organizations. Others operated without registering with the government, meeting in members' homes.

On June 10, 2010, the ECHR declared illegal the 2004 decision by the Moscow Regional Court to dissolve the Moscow congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, and ordered the country to pay Jehovah's Witnesses \$85,897 (€70,000). As of the end of the reporting period, the government had registered 409 Jehovah's Witnesses local organizations in 72 regions. Jehovah's Witnesses alleged that in some cases authorities had consulted with the ROC in determining whether to approve their requests for registration.

Despite years of trying to register its religious organizations, the Church of Scientology has no registered religious organizations in the country. In October 2009 the ECHR ruled in favor of the Churches of Scientology in Surgut and Nizhnekamsk, which the government had denied registration on the grounds that they had existed in those localities for less than 15 years. The ECHR declared that the 15-year requirement violated the European Convention on Human Rights' provisions on the freedoms of religion and association. The court awarded \$6,136 (€5,000) to each of the two Scientology groups, as well as \$12,272 (€10,000) to the two groups jointly for legal costs. Another case from the Church of Scientology regarding the 15-year rule remains pending at the ECHR. By the end of the reporting period, the government had not implemented the ECHR decisions.

Local authorities have also refused to register Scientology centers as religious organizations in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities. Accordingly, they cannot perform religious services (although they were allowed to hold meetings and seminars).

According to an annual report by the MOJ, as of January 1, 2010, there were 23,494 registered religious groups operating in the country, 54 percent of which are affiliated with the ROC. In 2005 (the last year for which statistics are available), authorities investigated the activities of 3,526 religious organizations. The MOJ sent notifications of violations to 2,996 such organizations. The courts issued rulings to dissolve 59 local organizations for violations of constitutional norms and federal legislation during that period.

Forum 18, a respected international organization that monitors religious freedom, reported in June 2010 that the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Dagestan continued to maintain a monopoly on all Muslim life in the Republic of Dagestan by controlling religious education and deciding who is qualified to teach.

Credible news reports indicated that Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov has instituted numerous decisions defining Islamic practices in Chechnya. He vetted imams and removed those of whom he did not approve. He also declared a prayer schedule for Muslims to follow.

Seventh-day Adventists reported continuing challenges for schoolchildren who observe Saturday as their Sabbath day. In some schools authorities refused to allow these children to take exams on a different day.

Under the MOJ there is a Council of Experts for Conducting State Religious Studies Expert Analysis. The council determines the religious nature of an organization on the basis of its founding documents and information about the fundamentals of its dogma and its corresponding practice; verifies and evaluates the authenticity of the information contained in documents submitted by the religious organization concerning the fundamentals of its dogma; and verifies the conformity of the religious organization's activity declared at the time of state registration with its actual activity.

The head of the council, Alexander Dvorkin, is an outspoken proponent of categorizing minority religious groups as extremist cults and "totalitarian sects." The term "sect" is commonly used pejoratively in the country. Minority religious groups, NGOs, and international observers dispute the council's objectivity in making recommendations on which religious groups should be registered. The Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religion and Sects and the Information-

Consultation Center of Saint Irineus of Lyons both proclaim the dangers of "totalitarian sects" and are supported by the ROC. Among the groups so labeled are Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, neo-Pentacostals, and Mormons. Dvorkin frequently used a violent crime committed by a mentally ill person who happened to be a member of a minority religious group as a pretext for collectively accusing the religious group as a whole of endorsing such acts.

In April 2010 Bishop Konstantin Bendas, First Deputy Chairman and Managing Director of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, circulated an appeal to their clergy mentioning "increasingly frequent attempts to recruit informants from among the parishioners, staff, and clergy of the Protestant churches by members of the FSB."

On April 20, 2010, in Ryazan, a university devoted to training MVD officers held a conference in conjunction with the United Russia party, devoted to discussing methods of opposing "extremism in contemporary society." At the conference the deputy head of the Ryazan antiextremism unit singled out Jehovah's Witnesses as an organization that his unit must work against.

On April 26, 2010, the Federal Service for Oversight in the Field of Communications, Information Technologies, and Mass Communications in the Ministry of Communications and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) revoked the license to distribute Jehovah's Witnesses' periodicals Awake! and The Watchtower, on the grounds that they were "extremist." Contrary to law, this action was taken in the absence of a court order.

In March 2010 the editor of the Portal-Credo.ru Web site reported that after his criticism of a government campaign against Jehovah's Witnesses, his financial sponsors had been put under unprecedented pressure to cease backing his Web site. The Web site is critical of the ROC and provides news and commentary on religious freedom restrictions and abuses in the country.

Over the past two years, authorities in Penza, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, and Moscow have initiated investigations seeking to block the importation of Scientology religious materials. The investigations in Penza and Yekaterinburg were dismissed as groundless in April 2009, and the materials were returned to the Scientologists. However, authorities in these two regions, using the extremism law, again seized Scientology materials in July and September 2009. In March 2010 police officers and officials from the MVD, FSB, and Prosecutor's Office seized materials from the Moscow Scientology branch.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on March, 12, 2010, in Voskresensk (Moscow Region) police stopped a truck carrying 440 pounds (200 kg) of religious literature. Police confiscated the literature even though none of the publications were on the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

On July 3, 2009, a district court in Moscow found Aslambek Ezhayev, the Moscow-based publisher of The Personality of a Muslim by Arab theologian Muhammad Ali Al-Hashimi, guilty of copyright violations and use of harmful software and fined him \$1,603 (50,000 rubles). These charges replaced an earlier charge of inciting religious hatred by distributing The Personality of a Muslim, a book that had been endorsed by the Chairman of the Council of Muftis Ravil Gaynutdin.

In some areas of the country, Muslim women reportedly were not allowed to wear headscarves in educational establishments. These included the village of Batrak in the Kamensky District of the Penza Region; the village of Shamhal-Station in Dagestan; and students at the Arsk Teachers College of Tatarstan.

On April 26, 2010, Interfax News reported that the government denied a request by Buddhists to grant the Dalai Lama an entry visa. The government cited its relationship with the People's Republic of China and stated that a visit could be considered when tensions between the Dalai Lama and China lessened. The Dalai Lama's last visit to the country was in 2004.

According to the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers, muftis expressed concern to Defense Minister Serdyukov that the military generally did not give Muslim conscripts time for daily prayers or alternatives to pork-based meals. Some army recruits reported that fellow servicemen insulted and abused them because they were Muslim.

Jehovah's Witnesses report that on May 31, 2010, the Arbitration Court ruled in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses' Administrative Center in a tax evasion case. On May 26, 2010, the tax inspectorate terminated its criminal investigation finding that there had been no criminal conduct. Authorities have been investigating the center, which has functioned as the national headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses, since 2004. Based on a questionable third-party estimate of what the center's property was used for and what that use was worth, the government concluded that Jehovah's Witnesses should pay \$1.2 million (36 million rubles). On February 16, 2010, the tax inspectorate froze the center's bank account and transferred \$138,000 (4.3 million rubles) to the government despite an order from the Arbitration Court suspending the tax evasion order. The tax inspectorate appealed the Arbitration Court's suspension, but had not returned the \$138,000 (4.3 million rubles) by the end of the reporting period.

Many religious groups had difficulty acquiring land or permits to build houses of worship. Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities.

In the greater Moscow region, Muslim groups previously complained that they have been limited to only four official mosques. The number of official mosques throughout the country has increased to 241. A representative of the Council of Muftis estimated in March 2010 that the total number of mosques and prayer rooms (both official and unofficial) in the country is more than 600,000. Although in 2009 local authorities in Balashikh allowed a local mosque to open and in Tambov Muslim communities were granted land for mosque construction, there has been no official response to longstanding requests for permission to build mosques in the regions of Perm, Oryol, and Komsomolsk.

Many nontraditional denominations frequently complained that they were unable to obtain venues for worship. Because they are small and often newly established, they typically lack the necessary resources to buy or rent facilities on the open market and must rely on government assistance. Because they are nontraditional, they frequently met opposition from the traditional communities and often were unable to find government officials willing to assist them with renting state-owned property. There were multiple reports of religious organizations which were not allowed to renew leases on public or private buildings. Representatives of numerous Protestant groups spoke about increasing difficulty in extending existing leases or signing new leases for worship premises, the majority of which are still state-controlled. Some religious groups reported that local authorities in recent years denied them permission to acquire land on which to construct places of worship. Authorities continued to deny construction permits to several groups.

Religious news sources claimed that authorities acting under the influence of the ROC sometimes prevented Orthodox churches not belonging to the ROC, including the True Orthodox, from obtaining or maintaining buildings for worship.

In December 2009 the Izhevsk Administration refused to issue a permit for construction of the Faith Working Through Love Evangelical Christian Church, despite the fact that the construction had begun in 2002 after all required paperwork had been filed.

In July 2009 the Arbitration Court of the Samara Region ordered the "Christ to the People" Protestant charitable mission to vacate the premises of the former Vympel cinema in Samara. The building had been rented to the community in 1996 and adapted for use as a church; however, the city's Department of Property Management found "irregularities" in use of the building as well as a delay in rent payment, and the court ordered termination of the contract with the church community.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that several attempts to hold annual conventions with thousands of their members in attendance have been interrupted, delayed, or cancelled due to interference from government authorities. Frequently,

Jehovah's Witnesses were unable to rent stadiums or other large venues due to alleged government pressure on the management of those facilities. This situation forced Jehovah's Witnesses to hold their conventions in fields instead. In the Vladimir Region, officials from the district and city administrations, the prosecutor's office, and the Sanitation and Epidemiological Services went to one convention location and ordered Jehovah's Witnesses to stop. When Jehovah's Witnesses refused, the leader of the convention later received an anonymous telephone call threatening physical violence. Another convention outside of Moscow proceeded despite efforts to interrupt the service with a tractor by plowing up the field.

Many religious groups were unable to regain property confiscated in the Soviet era or acquire new property. The Moscow-based SOVA Center stated the property restitution problem was most prevalent among Muslim and Protestant groups.

Although authorities have returned many properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, all four traditional religious groups continued to pursue restitution cases.

The ROC appeared to have greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups, although it still had disputed property claims, including claims to 30 properties in Moscow alone. The ROC continued to face property difficulties concerning the Yaroslavl Kremlin. All of the religious buildings at the Kremlin had been returned to the ROC by January 1, 2009, except the main cathedral. As of December 2008, the Moscow Patriarchate had 29,263 parishes and 804 monastic habitations (monasteries and nunneries). In January 2010 Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced that the government would provide \$64 million (two billion rubles) to restore ROC holy sites, monasteries, and churches destroyed by the Soviet government. During the reporting period, the State Duma continued its consideration of a draft law to transfer property of religious significance to religious organizations, including land, buildings, and movable property. The draft law would grant religious organizations ownership of all historical property in their use. Currently, religious organizations have the right to use such property indefinitely, but that property remains state property. If the draft law is passed, the ROC would become one of the country's major property holders.

The draft law has encountered opposition from many museum curators, as it would remove many historical icons from public museums. During the reporting period there were conflicts associated with the transfer of valuable museum exhibits to the ROC. In December 2009 Saint Petersburg's State Russian Museum delivered, for temporary display, the 14th-century Toropets icon of the Virgin Mary to the newly built Aleksandr Nevsky Church in a private community just outside Moscow. Throughout 2009 art historians and restorers continued their signature-gathering campaign, begun in 2008, to appeal to the government against the potential handover of Andrey Ruvlev's Trinity icon from the Tretyakov Gallery to the "Trinity-Saint Sergius Lavra" church. In August 2009 155 items from the Ryazan Kremlin Museum were handed over to the Ryazan Eparchy, allegedly for temporary use. The previous month, the Ministry of Culture had announced the establishment of a commission to prepare the transfer of "movable property of a religious nature" from the Ryazan Museum of History and Architecture to the Ryazan Eparchy.

In April 2010 (in response to a January 2010 announcement by Prime Minister Putin) authorities transferred ownership of Moscow's Novodevichy Convent from the State History Museum to the ROC. The government remains the formal owner of the convent, a UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage Site, but the complex is expected to be managed exclusively by the ROC.

Property claims by the ROC are legally complicated. Most of the Orthodox Church buildings that were returned to the ROC were not considered ROC property before 1917. The ROC was only entitled to use these buildings and theoretically could have been evicted, but there was no attempt to do so. The ROC fully owned only churches built, bought, or received after 1991.

The Catholic community reported 44 disputed properties, including the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral in Moscow. While most state-owned property was returned, the community had no success with buildings that had been privatized. A Moscow Catholic leader stated that some problems had been resolved positively and that the Catholic community would continue to work with authorities at the federal and local levels to resolve these problems.

The Jewish community was still seeking the return of a number of synagogues and cultural and religious artifacts. The Federation of Jewish Communities reported that federal officials and some regional officials had been cooperative in the community's efforts to seek restitution of former synagogues, although some Jewish groups asserted that the government had returned only a small portion of the total properties confiscated during the Soviet period. The international Chabad Lubavitch organization repeatedly sought return of the Schneerson Collection, a large collection of revered religious books and documents of the Lubavitcher rebbes, which the authorities consider part of the country's cultural heritage.

In June 2010 more than 40 countries met to work out a set of guidelines and principles to cover the restitution of real property that was confiscated by Nazi, fascist, and other regimes during the Holocaust. Despite agreeing to the previous stage of negotiations, the government's delegation was the only one present that did not sign on to the guidelines and principles.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Some NGOs accused the government of using counterterrorism methods to commit violations of religious freedom against the Muslim population. There were cases of Muslims being charged with extremism or terrorism in the absence of clear connections to such activities. These included individuals detained for possessing religious literature such as the Qur'an or on the basis of evidence allegedly planted by the police. Local police allegedly subjected some persons suspected of Islamic extremism to poor treatment or torture.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on July 30, 2009, the Voronezh Region Prosecutor's Office wrote to Yuriy Panov stating that police had been ordered to perform an investigation into how police treated him and to discipline the officers involved. In May 2009 authorities in Ramon (Voronezh Region) had detained Yuriy Panov and Nikolay Sitnikov, two Jehovah's Witnesses. Police identified the men as suspects in several local robberies and took them to the local police station where they were fingerprinted and photographed. When the men refused to acknowledge any involvement in the robberies, police allegedly forced Panov to wear a gas mask, to which they cut off the oxygen supply. They also allegedly threatened Panov with sexual assault and electrically shocked him. Under duress Panov admitted committing the crime. Police subsequently released both men and dropped all charges, stating that they had made a mistake. There were no further developments in this case during the reporting period.

Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, who declared that the republic "would be better off" if it were ruled by Shari'a (Islamic law), continued to enforce his ban against women entering government institutions without headscarves. According to the SOVA Center, the regime in Chechnya is nonsecular. In June 2010 news media reported a series of 12 incidents in Chechnya in which unknown men in police and military uniforms had fired paintball pellets at women who were not wearing headscarves. The assailants also videotaped the women and left fliers warning women that if they did not cover their heads the attackers will be "forced to resort to tougher measures."

Those religious groups outside the four traditional groups have sometimes been subject to harassment because of their outsider status. While most detentions for religious practices involved Muslims or Jehovah's Witnesses, there were occasional reports of short-term police detentions of members of other religious groups on religious grounds, but such incidents were generally resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained missionaries throughout the

country for brief periods or asked them to stop proselytizing, regardless of whether they were actually violating local statutes.

There were isolated instances of local officials detaining individuals who publicly discussed their religious views, but authorities usually resolved these cases quickly.

Law enforcement officials often harassed members of religious organizations.

In early 2009 the First Deputy Prosecutor General sent a letter to prosecutors' offices throughout the country ordering wide-ranging investigations of all Jehovah's Witnesses congregations and religious groups. The FSB requested that the prosecutor's office launch these investigations. Subsequently, prosecutors' offices, the FSB, and police summoned members of congregations and LROs for questioning and visited Kingdom Halls and personal homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. As a result of these orders, law enforcement, security services, and judiciary officials have opened more than 500 recorded investigations of congregations and unregistered groups of Jehovah's Witnesses. Additionally, a large number of warnings and notices had been served on congregations through June 2009. On April 16, 2010, Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin sent a letter to the prosecutor general protesting "the prejudicial attitude of certain officials of the prosecutor's office" toward Jehovah's Witnesses and asked him to "take steps to prohibit mass violations" of their rights. Lukin had not received a response to his letter at the end of the reporting period.

Since the rulings declaring 52 of the Jehovah's Witnesses' publications "extremist," police have detained numerous Jehovah's Witnesses across the country for up to several hours, usually without a warrant. Jehovah's Witnesses reported approximately 265 recorded incidents of detentions, searches, and seizure of literature in the country between January and April 2010.

Forum 18 reported that on May 7, 2010, police in Lobnya (Moscow Region) arrested Maria Zubko and Anna Melkonyan, while they were proselytizing. Police accused the women, who reportedly have no prior convictions, of committing robberies in the area. It is unclear whether the police accused them because they were Jehovah's Witnesses or because they had no suspects for the burglaries. By the end of the reporting period, the women had been held 55 days and had yet to be released.

In March 2010 a Pentecostal pastor, Ho Sun Pak, was released from prison after serving nine months. Pak had been accused of attempting to bribe an immigration officer in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk to close an inquiry into alleged illegal employment of Chinese workers building his church in the city of Kholmsk. Pak was released on parole due to heart problems. Supporters of Pak stated their belief that the alleged bribe was a pretense for his incarceration.

In March 2010 in the Khasavyurt area of Dagestan, local FSB officers detained two Jehovah's Witnesses in the street and held them for seven hours without access to a telephone or a lawyer. The officials did not identify themselves and did not explain on what charges they were holding the two men. The two Jehovah's Witnesses sent a complaint to the general prosecutor, as well as to the human rights ombudsman. Both federal officials responded by asking Dagestan authorities to investigate the possible violation of the two Jehovah's Witnesses' rights.

In March 2010 a member of Jehovah's Witnesses who was driving on the main Moscow-Ryazan road was stopped by traffic police to check for the transport of extremist literature. Although he did not have literature on the Federal List of Extremist Materials, he was ordered to report to local police.

In Nizhny Novgorod in late February 2010 two Jehovah's Witnesses, one a minor, were detained by police for distributing a leaflet refuting official allegations that the organization and its literature are extremist. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, the son was first interrogated alone and, when he refused to answer questions, he was told that documents confirming he had parents would be burned and that he would be sent to an orphanage.

On February 16, 2010, in Krasnoyarsk, local FSB officers raided approximately 20 private homes in search of works by the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi, and detained three readers of Nursi's works for approximately 36 hours. Many Russian translations of Nursi's works feature on the Federal List of Extremist Materials. On March 4, 2010, the FSB charged Aleksey Gerasimov, Fizuli Askarov, Yevgeny Petry, and Andrey Dedkov with criminal possession of Nursi's works, under the criminal code for "organizing activity by a banned religious or other association," which carries a maximum penalty of three years' imprisonment. The case continued at the end of the reporting period.

On February 8, 2010, Pastor Vadim Butov of the Seventh-day Adventists was detained at an airport in Nizhny Novgorod on his way to Australia. Customs officials found a prescription medication in his possession. Despite the fact that he had a prescription for the medication for a chronic condition and that his treating physician testified to the legitimacy of his use of the medication, officials held him under criminal charges. One of the officials reportedly told Pastor Butov that he was being targeted because he was a pastor of a strange religion. The case continued at the end of the reporting period.

Forum 18 reported that on December 11, 2009, in Makhachkala, Dagestan, numerous armed and masked police and an FSB agent raided the home of Ziyautdin Dapayev where a group of 30 Nursi readers was gathered. Police struck some of the persons present and forced them into the stairwell. They confiscated some 1,200 books and brochures. Dapayev maintained that his literature was not extremist and did not include the banned Nursi work *Risale-I Nur*. Police detained the readers for more than eight hours and pressured them to confess to belonging to Nurjular, a group banned by the government in 2008. Criminal cases were opened against Dapayev and his roommate for participation in a banned religious extremist organization. If convicted they would face a maximum of a two-year prison sentence. According to Forum 18, Ziyautdin Dapayev is a human rights lawyer for the NGO Memorial and has been a critic of the government's policies towards religion freedom, but is not affiliated with the readers of Said Nursi.

In September 2009 two Baptists were arrested in Kaliningrad for singing psalms in the streets. Police said that they were not permitted to hold a public meeting. The Baptists were fined \$71 (2,200 rubles). In July 2009 members of the Baptist community were arrested and called to the prosecutor's office, where authorities told them that they could not engage in religious activities in Kaliningrad without official registration.

On March 3, 2010, the Asbest City Court dismissed charges against Jehovah's Witnesses. In February 2008 police and the Federal Investigation Bureau raided Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Asbest. They had seized literature for further examination. In June 2008 the local prosecutor had petitioned the court to rule that the Jehovah's Witnesses' publications *Watchtower*, *Awake!* and *Draw Close to Jehovah* were extremist and had filed criminal charges against the leaders of the local Jehovah's Witnesses organization.

On April 4, 2009, FSB and police officials in Vladikavkaz detained and verbally abused two attorneys and one other traveler from Canada representing Jehovah's Witnesses in a local court case involving the possible dissolution of four congregations in North Ossetia. Officials claimed that the lawyers had entered a zone forbidden to foreigners when they pulled off the highway to visit the home of their driver's relatives. On April 5, 2009, the local judge ruled that all three foreigners would be deported for violating an allegedly restricted zone and for being disrespectful to the police. The lawyers would be barred from the country for five years if the deportation rulings come into force. Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the ruling; the case was still pending at the end of the reporting period.

On July 16, 2008, the FSB conducted a search of a Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall in Yekaterinburg and seized religious literature. Eighteen individuals were detained for up to nine hours in violation of article 22 of the constitution. According to Jehovah's Witnesses' attorneys, the FSB agents psychologically and physically abused Anastasia Lelikova, pinning her to the wall and twisting her arms. All 18 individuals contested the lawfulness of the raid, using both civil and

criminal procedures, but the complainants were refused access to court. There were no new developments during the reporting period.

On July 15, 2008, V.V. Mitin complained to the Salsk (Rostov Region) Interdistrict Investigation Unit, Rostov Region Investigation Department, and the Prosecutor General's Office (SIU) that the literature distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses in Salsk contained signs of religious extremism because it preached the superiority of Jehovah's Witnesses over other religious groups and incited religious enmity. The 12 pieces of literature accompanying the complaint were sent by Investigator S.V. Gruzinov of the SIU to the Rostov Center for Court Expert Studies for linguistic examination. On December 8, 2008, the Salsk City Prosecutor's Office filed a claim with the Salsk City Court to have the literature declared extremist. Court hearings started on March 12, 2009, and in May the court partially satisfied the prosecution's petition by demanding that the materials be examined by religious experts. Religious experts in Moscow analyzed these materials. The proceedings were then suspended. The prosecution applied for revocation of this decision to the Rostov Region Court. On June 25, 2009, the court granted this appeal and hearings were restarted. There were no new developments during the reporting period.

The Slavic Legal Center reported that on March 11, 2010, the Sayangorsk City Court (Khakasia Republic) ordered the demolition of a two-story house that was owned by the pastor and the administrator of the Glorification Pentecostal Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on March 1, 2010, court bailiffs sealed the Taganrog Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. It can no longer be used for meetings. This is a consequence of the December 2009 Supreme Court decision upholding the dissolution of the Taganrog congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. As of the end of the reporting period, none of the Jehovah's Witnesses' other 408 congregations, encompassing a membership of 157,000, had been dissolved. On June 1, 2010, Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the December 2009 decision to the ECHR.

In February 2010 authorities removed three more churches from the Suzdal Diocese Office of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC). The ROAC does not recognize the authority of Patriarch Kirill. In February 2009 the Federal Agency for State Property Management (Rosimushestvo) deprived it of 11 churches and two bell towers, including the ROAC's main church Tsar Constantine Cathedral, for failing to sign agreements for free use of the buildings. Despite multiple appeals the Suzdal ROAC has not succeeded in securing the return of its previously owned churches and bell towers. While attempting to remove religious objects from these churches in March 2009, ROAC officials were stopped by security service officials and prevented from removing them.

The city of Vladivostok ordered the ROAC in December 2009 to vacate its church building.

Police across the country participated in raids on various minority religious groups, often confiscating property. The following instances are representative of such raids, but do not constitute an exhaustive list.

On May 12, 2010, police in Chelyabinsk subjected Jehovah's Witnesses to 12 separate searches and confiscations of literature in homes, workplaces, and religious buildings. Those being searched received no copies of search warrants and did not regain their confiscated materials. Jehovah's Witnesses reported that police also confiscated a camera and video equipment that deaf members use to conduct meetings with sign language. Police had previously raided the same congregation in 2000, for which the ECHR awarded Jehovah's Witnesses monetary compensation in 2007.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on March 24, 2010, police in Novomichurinsk (Ryazan Region) forced V.N. Bazvanov into his apartment and searched it under a court order for five hours. They confiscated some of his literature and other church documents.

On March 17, 2010, police in Tambov raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. The police had a search warrant based on "incitement to hatred or hostility or denigration of an individual's human worth on the basis of religious affiliation," which carries a maximum two-year sentence under the criminal code. They did not give copies of the search warrants to the residents of the homes and told Forum 18 only that the investigation continued.

Scientists reported that on March 16, 2010, more than 25 police officials, MVD, FSB, and Prosecutor office personnel entered the Management Center of Scientology in Moscow to conduct a preinvestigation on the charge of extremism and to interrogate officers of the center regarding the seized materials. The next day representatives of the same agencies entered Church of Scientology of Moscow and seized additional religious literature.

According to the NGO Slavic Center for Law and Justice, on March 11, 2010, Sergey Borisov, mayor of Obor (Khabarovsk Territory), allegedly entered a building where Baptists were holding a prayer service and demanded that the congregation's leaders come with him for an official conversation. The leaders refused, and the mayor and his men beat them and dragged them into a car. The beating allegedly caused the men to bleed, and one of the victims was hospitalized and had to have an operation. The members saw the attack, and some were violently pushed aside when they tried to intervene. The Baptists also reported that the mayor said he was Russian Orthodox and would not tolerate the presence of other believers in his village. For his part the mayor contended that the Baptists refused to present their documents when ordered to and that they beat one of his men. Police began an investigation, and the Baptists appealed to the regional antiextremism unit to investigate.

Forum 18 reported that on February 28, 2010, in the city of Kaluga, 11 armed police officers with dogs raided a Lutheran ordination service attended by Archbishop Iosif Baron of the Augsburg Lutheran Church. Police stated they were acting on a tip about a "sect" using "extremist" literature. During the one-hour search, copies of the Bible and hymnals were the only texts discovered; nevertheless, the church's pastor was summoned to the local police station.

There were no reports of religious prisoners in the country. There were, however, numerous reports of short-term detentions on religious grounds.

FORCED RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Forum 18 reported that on June 24, 2010, Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin announced that he had asked the Supreme Court to review the Rostov-on-Don Regional Court's September 2009 decision against Jehovah's Witnesses.

Forum 18 reported that on June 2, 2010, Sergei Krivenko of the Presidential Council for Promoting the Development of Institutions of Civil Society and Human Rights stated that the committee was preparing a complaint to the Constitutional Court against the extremism law being used against Jehovah's Witnesses.

On May 21, 2010, Ombudsman Lukin issued his annual report. Over the past year, he has pursued numerous avenues to protect freedom of conscience. He voiced opposition to the law that would limit the right to share one's beliefs to only clergy and leaders of religious groups. He also interceded for minority religious groups in danger of losing their religious structures and protested administrative violations that would punish those who attempt to share their beliefs in public. Furthermore, he pointed to the government's role in distinguishing between freedom of expression and promoting racial and religious hatred, noting that some government bodies limited freedom of expression and treated it as "extremism." He also pointed to the common tendency of the government to tolerate expression and opinions verging on religious hatred including the prevalent use of "nonlegal and unscientific" terms like "sect, totalitarian sect, and destructive cult."

On August 18, 2009, the Supreme Court upheld a May 29 ruling by the Samara Regional Court rejecting an application by the Tolyatti City Prosecutor to dissolve the Tolyatti congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Federal authorities, and in many cases regional and local authorities, facilitated the establishment of new Jewish institutions. While construction of the Museum of Tolerance, devoted to the history of the country's Jews and the Holocaust, was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2011, the global economic crisis delayed the timeline. Work continued on an \$87 million (2.7 billion ruble) complex on land donated by the Moscow city government to house the museum, as well as Jewish community institutions, including a school, and a hospital.

During the reporting period, several long-standing official refusals regarding houses of worship were reversed, including for the Lutheran community in Krasnodar. The Baptist community reached a positive settlement with the Moscow Patriarchate ROC regarding a dispute over a house of worship in Lipetsk.

Federal and regional governments often allocated funding for the restoration of religious buildings. While the majority of religious organizations receiving support were Russian Orthodox, some Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant organizations also received financial support. According to a recent speech by a leading mufti, there were approximately 2,000 mosques throughout the country, an increase from only 98 10 years ago; the mufti attributed this growth to support from the government.

Law enforcement organizations have achieved some measure of success in arresting members of neo-Nazi and nationalist organizations, while courts sentenced several such persons to prison for their actions. On October 9, 2009, a jury found four members of the skinhead group, the "White Wolves," accused in 12 racist attacks (11 of them fatal) during 2006-07, guilty of murder but did not declare their actions to have been motivated by ethnic hatred. In February Judge Eduard Chuvashov sentenced members of the White Wolves to up to 23 years in jail. In April unknown assailants shot and killed Judge Chuvashov. On August 4 FSB officers arrested Anton Mukhachev, one of the suspected cofounders of the extreme nationalist organization Northern Brotherhood and its Internet-based game "Bolshaya Igra," and charged him with incitement of ethnic hatred. Mukhachev remained in detention awaiting trial as of the end of the reporting period.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including some physical attacks against individuals and communities because of the victims' religious affiliation. Terrorism and events related to the war in Chechnya promoted negative popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in many regions. Hostility toward non-ROC religious groups sparked harassment and occasional physical attacks. Religiously motivated violence continued, although it was often difficult to differentiate between economically motivated crimes and those based on xenophobia or religious discrimination.

According to the SOVA Center, in 2009 approximately 71 persons were killed and 33 injured in attacks based on race or religious affiliation. There were 42 documented violent attacks motivated by religious hatred on individuals from January 2009 to April 2010: 20 on Jehovah's Witnesses, 17 on Muslims, two on Protestants, and two on Russian Orthodox priests. In addition from January 2009 until April 2010, there were 65 documented acts of vandalism against the property of religious communities: 27 against Russian Orthodox property; 23 against Jehovah's Witnesses' property; seven against Jewish property; three against Muslim property; and one each for Protestants, Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Mormons, and pagans.

On November 15, 2009, in Moscow, Father Daniel Sysoev of the Apostle Thomas Church in Moscow, a priest known primarily for his missionary work among Muslims and anti-Islamic preaching, was shot and killed in his church. Another person was wounded. The investigation continued as of the end of the reporting period, but some persons believed that

the killing took place for religious reasons, since Sysoev repeatedly had received threats from persons who called themselves Muslims. On December 5, 2009, another priest of the same church was attacked and beaten.

On June 8, 2010, two unknown persons entered a Jehovah's Witnesses prayer hall in Nartkala, Kabardino-Balkariya Republic, and assaulted two security guards, who were hospitalized. The assailants then lit a fire inside the building, which the security guards put out after the assailants left. Police opened an investigation on the incident.

According to a May 24, 2010 report from Jewish.ru, soccer fans from Saint Petersburg angry about their team's loss in a game held in Rostov-on-Don beat Roman Kosarev, a Jew, and shouted anti-Semitic epithets including "Heil" and "Kill the Jews." Authorities began an investigation and promised to bring those responsible to justice. There were no further developments by the end of the reporting period.

In December 2009 unknown assailants violently attacked two Jews outside a Moscow yeshiva, and a young Jewish man was assaulted by a neo-Nazi who shouted "Heil!" in the Moscow subway. In the latter incident, police detained the alleged attacker but charged him only with "minor hooliganism."

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, between September and December 2009, 10 violent attacks on their members were reported in Moscow, Yaroslavl, Tyumen, Penza, Rostov, Chelyabinsk, Voronezh, and Novosibirsk. Since December 2009 Jehovah's Witnesses reported at least 17 violent attacks on their members in Bashkortostan, Chelyabinsk, Dagestan, Irkutsk, Ivanovo, Krasnodar, Kurgan, Leningrad, Moscow, Rostov, Saratov, Tambov, Tatarstan, Vladimir, Volgograd, and Yaroslavl. The following incidents are representative of those violent attacks.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on April 5, 2010, in Kurgan (Kurgan Region), a student at School No. 49 punched a boy who was a member of Jehovah's Witnesses twice in the stomach during recess and threatened to do more if he were to attend his church's meeting house. After school, the same boy and another student found the member of Jehovah's Witnesses, pulled him down to the second floor of the building, hit him multiple times, and tripped him. The boy's mother took him to the emergency room to attend to his injuries. As this was not the first such incident, she reported the violence to the police.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on February 10, 2010, in Murmansk (Murmansk Region), a man invited Jehovah's Witnesses Vladimir Mishchuk and Aleksey Potapenkov into his apartment. He locked the door and pulled out a large knife and threatened to kill the two men. The man held the Witnesses captive for roughly 30 minutes while he threatened. After he became calm, the two Jehovah's Witnesses unlocked the door and left.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on February 4, 2010, in Kineshma (Ivanovo Region), two female Jehovah's Witnesses (both approximately 70 years old) were sharing their beliefs. A man who appeared to be in his thirties opened his apartment door, kissed the cross around his neck, then slammed one of the women into the door frame and shoved her down the stairs. She fell to the bottom of the stairs, hit her head on the entrance door, and broke her arm. The two women filed a report with the police.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on January 29, 2010, in Baymak (Bashkortostan Republic), two female Jehovah's Witnesses were attempting to meet with a young man when another man approached and pushed one of the women onto the stairs. He then kicked the second woman in the back and she fell down the stairs. He continued to beat the women until they left the building. Upon arriving at the police station, police refused to accept the women's report of the attack and insulted them. The women then filed a complaint with the Bashkortostan Republic Department of Internal Affairs and the prosecutor's office. On February 14, 2010, at 5:20 a.m., the man who had previously attacked the women showed up at their home and began knocking and yelling on their door. He only left the building when police intervened.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on December 19, 2009, in Rybinsk (Yaroslavl Region), a man attacked two female Jehovah's Witnesses after they discussed their beliefs with him in his apartment building. He followed them upstairs after expressing his lack of interest in their message. He broke the glasses of Lyudmila Polyakova, hit her on the head, and twisted her arm behind her back. He also grabbed Olga Nikolayeva by the collar and hit her in the face while shouting and swearing. After approximately 10 minutes, he shoved the women into an elevator and left.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on December 14, 2009, in Vladimir (Vladimir Region), doctors prevented Lyubov Savelyeva from reading religious literature and sharing her beliefs with fellow patients while she was in the hospital. The doctors threatened to withhold treatment should she not comply.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that on December 8, 2009, in Tambov (Tambov Region), an unidentified man came upon two Jehovah's Witnesses waiting for an appointment at an apartment. He blocked their exit and swung at one of the Witnesses, hitting her on the head. She temporarily lost consciousness and fell. When the police came they took the two women to the police station and interrogated them three times before releasing them.

In some instances police assisted Jehovah's Witnesses during or after attacks. In others police subjected Jehovah's Witnesses to further ridicule and mistreatment and refused to investigate attacks.

Although Jewish leaders reported significant improvements in official attitudes towards Jews, anti-Semitism remained a significant problem at the societal level. The NGO Moscow Bureau of Human Rights reported that 43 synagogues and community centers were vandalized in 2009.

On June 22, 2010, an explosion next to a synagogue in Tver took place in the middle of the night, damaging the exterior of the building but causing no casualties. The governor of the Tver Region announced that he would take the investigation of the attack under his personal control. As of the end of the reporting period, there was no further information on the attack.

Arsonists also attacked a Jehovah's Witnesses prayer hall in Budyonovsk, Stavropol, on March 20, 2010; no arrests were reported in connection with the attack during the reporting period. On January 9, 2010, a group of young men attacked a Jehovah's Witnesses prayer hall in Sochi; police refused to open a criminal investigation. Jehovah's Witnesses also reported multiple incidents of vandalism including rocks being thrown at their religious buildings, gates being torn off, and graffiti being painted on the buildings.

On September 12, 2009, four skinhead youths were arrested for throwing two Molotov cocktails at a synagogue in Khabarovsk. The Khabarovsk Anti-Extremist Department police opened criminal proceedings against two of the suspects. They faced up to five years of imprisonment for the synagogue attack and up to life imprisonment for the police attack. On July 16, 2009, a rock was thrown through the window of the Syktyvar Jewish community center in the Komi Republic. On July 12, 2009, in Ryazan, unknown vandals painted swastikas on the doors of a Jewish community center.

The SOVA Center also reported desecrations of graves in Jewish cemeteries in Nizhny Novgorod, Makhachkala, and Kaliningrad.

Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and occasionally staged demonstrations throughout the country against Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other minority religious groups.

On October 22, 2009, the Tyumen Region Prosecutor's Office announced that Svetlana Shestakova, a professor of sociology in Tyumen and member of the missionary department of the Tobolsk-Tyumen Diocese of the ROC, had been charged with incitement to religious hatred and denigrating the worth of a person or group because of their religion after some of her students complained about the content of her lectures in 2008. She spoke about blood libel, the spurious

charge that Jews use the blood of Christian children to make matza. She made other remarks offensive to Muslims, non-Orthodox Christians, and others. Muslim, Catholic, Jewish, and Krishna organizations submitted a complaint to the local prosecutor. The investigation was still underway at the end of the reporting period.

The Perm Diocese of the ROC maintains a Department of Religious Security and Assistance for the Victims of Destructive Cults and Sectarian Extremism. Its founding bishop has previously spoken against religious tolerance programs in the region, saying that such programs open the way for "destructive sects" and their dangerous ideology to corrupt children.

In addition to the aforementioned attacks, several Jehovah's Witnesses reported being fired or forced to resign from their jobs when their superiors discovered that they were Jehovah's Witnesses.

Muslims continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some regions. After terrorists associated with Chechen, Ingush, and Islamic extremists seized a school in 2004 in Beslan, North Ossetia, interethnic and interreligious tensions resulting in discrimination persisted in the region without the authorities' intervention, according to NGOs.

During the reporting period, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice and a number of minority "nontraditional" religious leaders asserted that the government and majority religious groups increasingly used the mass media, conferences, and public demonstrations to foment opposition to minority religious groups, characterizing them as threats to physical, mental, and spiritual health, and asserting that these groups threatened national security. Television channels broadcast several programs about "dangerous cults and sects" and implied that these groups included Pentecostals and other proselytizing religious groups.

During the reporting period, there were a number of "antisectionarian" shows and statements broadcast on state-run media or media owned by state-run entities. In November 2009 the "Honest Monday" program on Gazprom-owned NTV featured a panel discussion of religious representatives decrying "totalitarian religious sects." The presenter concluded: "Sects are not an alternative to traditional religious groups. Sects mean moneymaking, brainwashing, and, in the end, murders. Sects pose a threat to our children. Remember this."

The press routinely continued to refer to Jehovah's Witnesses as a "sect," although they have existed in the country for more than a century.

Seventh-day Adventists reported that local media often carried stories injurious to the church's reputation. The organization also reported that often these stories originated with priests in the ROC.

Journalists and the public liberally labeled Islamic organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Numerous press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment.

There were many reports of anti-Semitic publications during the reporting period. A number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers that print anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic articles were readily available throughout the country. There were also reports of anti-Semitic literature on sale in cities across the country. The estimated number of xenophobic publications exceeded 100, many sponsored by the local chapters of the National Power Party. In addition there were at least 80 Web sites in the country with anti-Semitic content. There was evidence of a concerted government campaign to limit the sale and distribution of anti-Semitic literature.

Although there are several laws which address crimes motivated by ethnic or religious hatred, law enforcement agencies enforced these laws inconsistently, generally infrequently, and sometimes arbitrarily.

Authorities rarely prosecuted or sentenced those arrested for attacks and vandalism against religious minorities, and they often failed to bring hate-crime charges even when religious bigotry was clearly involved. Some government officials denied that there was a problem with hate crimes or claimed that if they did exist, they were manifestations of economic

ills. Some government officials and human rights observers noted that, due to heavy caseloads, prosecutors chose to file easily proven charges of vandalism or hooliganism rather than risk an acquittal on the harder-to-prove hate-crime motive. As a result, hate-crime legislation was often not enforced.

In instances where local authorities prosecuted cases, courts often imposed suspended sentences. In some cases, however, the hate-crime motive was taken into consideration. Under the law an individual convicted of committing an act of vandalism motivated by ideological, political, national, racial, and religious hatred or enmity can be sentenced for up to three years' confinement.

After finding that Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was freely available and being used by far-right groups, prosecutors in Ufa moved to ban the book. On March 26, 2010, the Ufa City Court declared it extremist. The court decision meant that the book was then placed on the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

There were no other reports that government prosecuted any persons or groups for anti-Semitic statements or publications during the reporting period. However, the government publicly criticized nationalist ideology and expressed support for legal action against anti-Semitic acts.

By the end of the reporting period, no ruling had been made in the trial over the "Forbidden Art" collection. In 2009 a local prosecutor in Moscow charged former Sakharov Center director Yuriy Samodurov and former curator of the New Tretyakov Gallery Andrey Yerofeyev with promoting religious hatred under the criminal code for installing a modern art exhibit entitled "Forbidden Art" in 2006.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. government continued to engage the government, religious groups, NGOs, and religious freedom advocates in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. Embassy and consulate officers worked with NGOs to encourage the development of cooperative programs designed to train law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance.

One position in the embassy's political section was dedicated to reporting on the status of religious freedom. This officer worked closely with other U.S. officers in the embassy and consulates general around the country.

Consular officers routinely assisted U.S. citizens involved in criminal, customs, and immigration cases; officers were sensitive to any indications that these cases involved possible violations of religious freedom. U.S. officials raised such issues with the MID and MVD. Because U.S. missionaries and religious workers constituted a significant component of the local U.S. citizen population, the embassy conducted a vigorous outreach program to provide consular services; maintain contact for emergency planning purposes; and inquire about the missionaries' experiences with immigration, registration, and police authorities as one gauge of religious freedom.

The U.S. ambassador addressed religious freedom in consultations with government officials. He met with many religious leaders both from the country, including the most senior members of the ROC, and from the United States to discuss their concerns.

The U.S. government continued to engage the government on its adherence to international standards of religious freedom by meeting with the human rights ombudsman and other high-ranking officials to make the U.S. position known. Officials in the U.S. Department of State met regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations, as well as with visiting representatives of LROs, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, and members of the State Service Academy that trains regional officials in charge of registering LROs.

Officials of the consulates general in Saint Petersburg, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg met with religious leaders from a range of denominations in several cities.

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